



**National  
Urban League**

*Empowering Communities.  
Changing Lives.*

**Testimony  
Of The Honorable Marc Morial  
Before the House Government Reform Subcommittee  
On Federalism and the Census**

***“Life In The Big City: What Is Census Data Telling Us About Urban America?  
Are Policymakers Really Listening?”  
Tuesday, May 10, 2005 10:00 a.m.***

I am very pleased to be with you today. I want to thank my fellow former Mayor, Mike Turner for inviting me to share with you my thoughts on the importance of Census data in the work we do at the National Urban League to empower America's cities.

The National Urban League was founded in 1910 and is the nation's oldest and largest nonprofit, nonpartisan, community-based movement devoted to empowering African Americans to enter the economic and social mainstream,. The mission of the Urban League movement is to enable African Americans to secure economic self-reliance, parity and power, and civil rights.

The heart of the Urban League movement is our professionally staffed affiliates in more than 100 cities in 35 states and the District of Columbia. These professionally staffed offices are where Urban League services come to life - where people and their neighborhoods grow, change, and strengthen.

With programs and resources for all levels of education, job placement and training, affordable housing and home buying, business development, after-school care, mentoring, healthcare counseling, and much more, the affiliates provide residents and their families with unlimited opportunities and guidance so they may rise as high as they choose to go. They also cultivate a symbiotic relationship with local residents and companies, encouraging them to volunteer through Urban League programs and to advocate for positive change in their communities.

This grassroots activity relies on a number of resources to achieve success. Among the most important of these tools are the research and policy analysis and development that the National Urban League provides not only to our affiliates but to national, state and local decision-makers as well. Our research and policy activity draws heavily from Census data and demographic information, which we have found to be an invaluable part of our work.

For example, each year, we produce the *State of Black America Report*, which is a barometer of the conditions, experiences and opinions of Black America. It examines black progress in education, homeownership, entrepreneurship, health and other areas.

The publication forecasts certain social and political trends and proposes solutions to the community's and America's most pressing challenges. Accompanying the report is the *Equality Index*, a statistical measurement comparing the conditions between blacks and whites in economics, health, education, social justice and civic engagement.

According to the 2005 Equality Index, the status of African Americans is .73 or 73 percent compared to the conditions of their white counterparts, marginally unchanged from 2004 index results.

In preparing SOBA and the Equality Index each year, we rely heavily upon Census Data, without which, we'd have no benchmark for comparison. Not only does the Census data, such as the Statistical Abstract, provide useful information for the study, it in fact often triggers the selection of subject areas to research in depth.

In addition to SOBA, we also use Census data for our ongoing policy and research work. There are a number of organizations and think tanks that produce reports focusing on the economic circumstances of low- and middle-income families and how public policies affect their economic situation. The National Urban League's Policy Institute, based here in Washington, is unique among these organizations in that it focuses on African-American workers and families.

The National Urban League Policy Institute has for a number of years served as a Census Information Center.. As a result of this partnership, the Institute is able to provide technical assistance to Urban League affiliates requesting demographic information vital to their day-to-day work in their communities.

In addition, the Institute uses Census data as an integral part of its research and policy activity. For example, for the monthly Current Population Survey, the Basic and the March Supplement, are central to the Institute's ability to perform its analyses and write its reports.

The Policy Institute's Quarterly Jobs Reports, for example, are data driven. While the Quarterly Jobs Reports occasionally draw on Bureau of Labor Statistics and other data sources, they depend almost exclusively on the Bureau of Census Current Population Survey's monthly data. Institute economists use the online Data Ferrett to retrieve the monthly Current Population Survey data. The Census data information is copied into Excel spreadsheets in order to compile the desired time series data. The Quarterly Jobs Reports are based on the computed statistics, regressions run and trend analyses conducted by the economists. The Quarterly Jobs Reports also make extensive use of graphs derived from Census data.

The Institute also produces National Urban League Fact Sheets on topics such as poverty rates or access to health insurance, always with a focus on ethnic groups, particularly African Americans. These Fact Sheets extensively, if not exclusively, depend on Census data.

All of this information is invaluable to us as we develop and recommend policies and programs for use on the ground where it really counts. Thanks to this information, we are able to assess what kinds of programs and dollars are needed in our local communities and how they affect the people we serve.

We are excited about the prospects for the American Community Survey, which will provide a huge net benefit to the National Urban League's research and policy activity. The new annual survey will enable us to stay on top of trends as they occur rather than rely on the decennial Census data to measure the State of Black America each year. This up-to-date information will also substantially improve our ability to recognize population demographics and recommend programs and policies that address the needs of our community.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your leadership in ensuring that Census data that is so crucial to the work we do and the communities we serve viable, respected and appreciated. Your commitment to our urban communities makes a difference to all of us who care about the direction of America's cities.

I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts with you and look forward to working with you on these important issues. I will be happy to take any questions you may have.